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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study compared lesson plans from three groups of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers: experienced teacher; graduate students who had taught ESL before returning to school; and graduate students with no ESL teaching experience. The lesson plans were based on a textbook listening activity that included directions for listening to and responding to a taped monologue. Problematic aspects of the book's directions were analyzed, and possible approaches and activities were anticipated. The subjects' lesson plans were then analyzed and compared for focus and structure of the pre- and post-listening activities they included. Results showed, contrary to some previous research, that experienced teachers and experienced students tended to focus on linguistic elements in the text in planning pre-listening activities, while some inexperienced students went beyond the text to include issues in the broader world. Patterns for planning the post-listening activities were less clear. Implications for pre- service teacher education are discussed. Contains seven references. (MSE)

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# Experienced and Inexperienced ESL Teachers' Lesson Planning for a Listening Activity

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## Abstract

This paper reports research that grew out of questions raised by students' completed assignments in a teacher-training course. It is a largely descriptive study that reports and compares in some detail lesson plans from three groups of teachers. The lesson plans of a group of experienced teachers were compared to the lesson plans of both experienced graduate students (those who had taught ESL/EFL before returning to school) and inexperienced graduate students (those with no ESL/EFL teaching experience). Results showed that, contrary to some previous research, experienced teachers and students tended to focus on linguistic elements in the text while planning prelistening activities while some inexperienced students went beyond the text to include issues in the world. Patterns for planning the postlistening activity are less clear. Implications for pre-service teacher education are noted.

## Introduction

Richards and his colleagues (1995) found that preservice and experienced ESL teachers differed in their approaches to lesson planning. Preservice teachers focused on literal comprehension of the reading text to be taught; they wanted to make sure that the students understood the vocabulary and grammar in the story. The experienced teachers, on the other hand, planned on eliciting a global understanding of the story and on actively involving students with the text by engaging their background knowledge. The experienced teachers' "lesson plans reveal an attempt to deal with the overall social meaning of the story as a primary goal, rather than approaching reading as decoding language" (p. 10).

## Background to the Study

Linguistics 2142, *Techniques and Procedures for ESL* is a team-taught course that is a prerequisite for all classes in the TESL Certificate Program at a large public university in the eastern United States. The class membership in any given year is a mixture of experienced and inexperienced teachers, graduate students, many of whom are teaching or will teach in the English Language Institute as part of their teaching assistant duties. The purpose of the course is to give a broad, practical orientation to current ESL/EFL practice. Toward that end, a number of short assignments requiring lesson planning are given throughout the term.

One such assignment involved the design of a prelistening and postlistening exercise based on a page in a text book used in a lower-intermediate listening course. Richards (1993) has shown how central the text book is for second language teaching. For many ESL/EFL teachers, the text books <u>are</u> the plan, or at least it is in response to the text books that the lessons are planned. The aim of the assignment was to allow students to apply information from the course to a concrete teaching activity. The assignment was in this form:

> I. Listening: Write a script of what you would say in class to present the lesson on the attached sheet. (Interactions II, Ch. 4, Part 4; tape #0292.4). Make comments, if necessary, on what you would do and what you would have students do. What would you say for the prelistening explanation, how many times would you play the tape and how would you check the answers? In your prelistening explanation, consider what you would tell the students to aid top-down processing (e.g., cultural background, schema), bottom-up processing (e.g., word recognition, syntax, etc.) and the task. Are there any difficulties or problems in the task that you should alert the students to? II. Speaking: Design a follow-up speaking activity for this listening task.

The textbook task asked ESL students to listen to a taped monologue by a housewife and number the pictures describing her daily activities in the correct order. The complete instructions are below:

> "People used to think that women who stayed home and took care of their children were not real members of the labor force. A housewife was 'just' a housewife. Today we recognize that housewives often work as much as sixty hours a week (without pay!) and have a variety of skills. You are going to hear one housewife describe a typical workday, Some of her activities are shown in the pictures below. Before your listen, look at the pictures. Describe each activity. Then listen to the monologue several times. Number the pictures in the correct order. Activities that happened at the same time should have the same number. (Tanka & Baker, 1990: 44)

In order to set criteria for evaluating the lesson plans, and to see if this particular task would allow our students to synthesize the material we had presented in class, two instructors analyzed the task ourselves. One problematic aspect of the directions was the sentence "Activities that happened at the same time should have the same number." We thought that a teacher would have to stress this part of the directions in order to facilitate the completion of the task. In fact, one of us had taught the lesson before and remembered these directions as being very confusing for the students. We also saw the picture of the woman cooking breakfast as culture specific. To know

that this picture signified "breakfast," students would need to know that "eggs + coffee = breakfast" in the United States. They would also need to know that the other cooking picture (a woman stirring a pot) signified "dinner." Another drawing showed the woman watching television alone, her face perhaps one foot from the TV set. We thought students would interpret this image as working on a computer. The way we saw to deal with these problems was to elicit vocabulary by having students name the activity in each picture before listening. Finally, we thought that a possible postlistening speaking activity would focus on talking about daily routines.

When we received the lesson plans, we were struck by the diversity of approaches to the material. Experienced and inexperienced students seemed to be lesson planning differently, and, contrary to the findings of Richards et al. (1995), the experienced teachers seem to be linguistically oriented and the inexperienced teachers more concerned with social meaning. I decided to expand the base of experienced teachers by asking colleagues to simulate lesson planning for the same activity. My research question was: In line with previous research, do inexperienced teachers rely on the linguistic content of texts and experienced teachers on overall meaning when planning their lessons?

**Design of the study**

I have spoken of the range of teaching experience found among the students in the class. After reviewing student data sheets completed at the beginning of term, I found that some of the students met Nunan's (1992:141) operational definition of experience: two or more years of teaching. I then decided to analyze three groups: experienced students, (ESs), those taking Linguistics 2142 who had two or more years of second/foreign language teaching experience; inexperienced students (ISs), those enrolled in Linguistics 2142 who had fewer than two years ESL/EFL teaching experience; I added the group experienced teachers (ETs), those working as instructors in the English Language Institute who had from three to more than twenty years teaching experience. The ETs got the same prompt as the students had. The total number of ESs was five, of ISs nine and ETs seven. Here, for space reasons, I will fully report the plans for the

prelistening activity and summarize those for the postlistening activity

## Experienced Teachers' Prelistening Activities: Focus on the Lexicon

Four of the seven ETs began the lesson by asking students for a definition of "housewife." Three of the four simply elicited a definition while the fourth began by brainstorming words associated with housework and then asked "What's the name of a person who does housework?" Two of the ETs personalized the activity, in one case by asking if any of the students were housewives and in the other by asking students if they would consider the teacher (a married woman who works outside the home) one.

Two of the four who began by defining "housewife" then started discussing the illustrations on the Listening Task page to make sure that students knew the vocabulary for each action. Before one did this, however, she drew the students' attention to the phrase on the page, "'just' a housewife." The other said she might follow up the definition of "housewife" with two or three quick questions like "Do housewives get paid a lot of money?" and "Do you think housewives are happy with their jobs?" before looking at the page. In both cases, the ETs seemed to be clear that the questions should not take much time, that the focus should be elsewhere, on the vocabulary. Both said they would go through the ten pictures to make sure the students had the necessary vocabulary. Both saw the picture of breakfast as needing extra explanation; they felt that ESL students would not necessarily equate eating coffee and eggs with breakfast.

The other two ETs planned different things. One elicited tasks housewives do in the ESL students' home cultures and things they do in the United States. She used this brainstorming of activities to elicit the vocabulary on the tape; she said she would pre-teach any vocabulary that did not arise, before looking carefully at the pictures to see if the students understood what was being depicted. Though she approached the vocabulary somewhat differently than the other two did, the main focus for this teacher was also on the words for the activities on the text book page.

The last of these four ETs, the least experienced of them, had students work in groups to brainstorm first tasks they did during the day, then discuss the number of hours a housewife works in a day, the kinds of skills she must have, and an appropriate hourly wage for housewives.

A fifth ET planned her lesson in a way that made it very similar to those of the first four. The difference was that there was no explicit discussion of the meaning of "housewife." However, she did work extensively with vocabulary. She focused her prelistening task on the things students do during the day before pairing the students and asking them to label the action in each picture. She then would check their answers and go over problem vocabulary before working on sequence words. She would elicit sequence words, dividing them on the board in two columns, time sequence (then, next) and simultaneous action (while, at the same time).

Each of the other two teachers approached the task somewhat differently, going outside the text to focus on gender roles. One focused on the vocabulary, just as the first five did. However, this ET asked the students to look at the words "labor force" and "housewife" in the instructions on the textbook page. She asked students to name members of the labor force, after defining that term, then asked "Are housewives part of the labor force?" She claimed that the tape would deal with this question, though it really does so only obliquely at best, ending the description of her day with "And that was my day. Nothing glamorous -- I'm 'just' a housewife, as they say." After working on this question, the teacher paired students and asked them to figure out the action in each picture.

The other ET began her lesson with women's roles in American and home cultures. This discussion would end with an elicitation of things that housewives do before students work in pairs to label each picture.

Six of seven ETs began their lesson with a discussion of the vocabulary that they saw as useful for comprehending the passage. Five of the six confined themselves to teaching the meaning of "housewife" and the vocabulary of daily routines. The sixth went outside the text to talk about "the labor force" and women's roles in

it while also teaching the daily routine vocabulary. The seventh began with a discussion of gender roles before looking at the vocabulary of routines. To some degree, the difference is a matter of emphasis. Those who began with vocabulary by no means ignored social issues. All of them, in fact, seemed to address, at least implicitly, the notion of "housewife" as socioculturally constructed.

**Experienced Students' Prelistening Activities: Focus on the Lexicon**

Three of the five experienced students, those with more than two years of second/foreign language teaching experience who were taking the techniques course, began their lesson plans by asking the question "What do housewives do?"

The first set up the activity by saying "We are going to hear a housewife describe a typical day. What do housewives do?" She would then write the vocabulary on the board. At this point, she would move outside the text and ask whether many women are housewives in the students' home countries and, if so, whether they do the tasks/actions on the board. She would also ask if there were any househusbands. After asking this question, she would turn back to the pictures in the text book to make sure students understood the vocabulary.

The second started with eliciting the students' daily routines before asking them what their (presumably housewife) mothers do during the day. This activity was structured through a class survey. The students then would look at the pictures in the book.

The third ES who began with a description of a housewife's daily activity moved on to ask students to look at the pictures and say what skills a housewife might have; she then previewed some vocabulary from the script.

The other two ESs each had a slightly different approach. Though the first did not begin with "What does a housewife do?" her approach was actually quite similar to that of the first three ESs. She began by focusing on the pictures in the book, asking students to work in pairs, one person describing a picture and the other guessing which

one it is. She then went on to concentrate on the phrases "'just' a housewife" from the text book and "mother-in-law" from the script. The teacher brought up the negative stereotypes associated with mothers-in-law in American popular culture.

The last ES focused on occupations rather than daily activities. She began by showing pictures and asking students to guess what the people did for a living. She then asked them to fill out a chart detailing whether certain professions in their country were dominated by males or females. The students compared these charts in groups and identified, cross-culturally, two professions dominated by men and two by women. The teacher next led a brief discussion of women's roles in general and housewives in particular in students' countries. Because the text book page showed a washing machine, she also asked them to discuss what labor-saving devices they had. She then asked the students to focus on the text's pictures and describe them each in a sentence.

Four of the five ESs wrote prelistening lesson plans that addressed the vocabulary of the unit, that of daily routines. Though the focus was on vocabulary, three of the five also addressed the role of the housewife in more or less explicit ways. This vocabulary-centered approach was also the basic pattern for the majority of ETs.

**Inexperienced Students' Prelistening Activities: Two Foci**

The inexperienced students clustered into two groups. The first group followed much the same pattern as the ETs and ESs did. The second group moved outside the text to address social issues more directly.

In the first group, four ISs began with a definition of "housewife" and a list of household activities before moving on to describing the pictures in the text. One thought she would bring up that a housewife does work but does not get paid. Another thought she would compare housewives in the United States and in students' home countries. The third would only preview the vocabulary. The fourth IS in this group confined his prelistening exercise to vocabulary explanation of "housewife" and "activities verbs."

The fifth IS focused on personalizing the activity by asking which students had mothers who worked as housewives. She then asked them to tell about the things their mothers did during the day before moving on to describing the pictures in the text book.

The second group emphasized social issues more than the text. Three ISs began with a discussion of gender roles. One IS suggested that the teacher might begin by talking about how, in the past, housewives were not considered members of the labor force. She asked the students how they felt about that situation and about the role of women in their country. She asked whether gender roles were changing in their countries. She then moved on to asking students to describe the pictures in the text and to explaining unknown vocabulary.

The next IS also began with jobs, showing pictures of different occupations and asking about gender-specific jobs. She also asked about gender roles in the students' countries. She would pre-teach three vocabulary words: housewife, skill and labor force. After that, she would introduce the gender-neutral term "homemaker", ask what skills homemakers need to know, and what household jobs men can do.

The third IS to take this approach began by talking about the changes over the past two generations in the role of the housewife. Though technology has made some aspects of the job easier, expectations about other responsibilities have risen so that housewives are busier than ever. She then moved on to a picture description activity with the pictures in the text.

A fourth IS did not begin with a discussion of gender roles, but indeed spent most of the time in the prelistening activity debating roles. He began by eliciting vocabulary for the pictures on the textbook page before asking students to list the pros and cons for the statement (in the text book) "...people used to think that women who stayed home and took care of their children were not considered members of the labor force."

The ISs, then, were divided between those who would primarily preteach the vocabulary of the unit and those who would look at gender roles as a way to enter the activity.

**Discussion: Prelistening**

The foci of the three groups can be summarized as follows:

Prelistening

| | Linguistic Focus | Social Focus |
|---|---|---|
| ETs (7) | 6 (85.7%) | 2 (28.5%) |
| ESs (5) | 4 (80%) | 2 (40%) |
| ISs (9) | 5 (55.5%) | 4 (44.4%) |

While we saw relative agreement among experienced teachers and experienced students that the vocabulary of the lesson is what needs to be taught in prelistening activities for comprehension to take place, we saw a lack of agreement among the inexperienced. Contrary to the results reported by Richards et al. (1995), which found that inexperienced teachers tended to want to communicate the linguistic content of the text, approximately half of the ISs would get students talking about social issues like gender roles before addressing the vocabulary of the lesson in prelistening tasks.

**Postlistening Activities: A Focus on the World**

All three groups, ETs, ESs and ISs, had majorities that moved outside the text to focus on social meaning in the postlistening activities. In planning postlistening activities, there was less a focus on linguistic matters and more on moving outside the text. Indeed, four of the seven experienced teachers, four of the five experienced students and seven of the nine inexperienced students planned activities that would bring in societal issues of gender equity. Two in each group went beyond a linguistic focus to personalize the activity, relating it to the students' daily lives. A higher percentage of students to teachers planned to include societal issues. The figures below summarize the data:

Postlistening

| | Linguistic Focus | Social Focus | Personalization |
|---|---|---|---|
| ETs (7) | 1 (14.3%) | 4 (57.1%) | 2 (28.6%) |
| ESs (5) | 1 (20%) | 4 (80%) | 2 (40%) |
| ISs (9) | 2 (28.6%) | 7 (77.8%) | 2 (28.6%) |

**Implications**

Richards et al. (1995) reported that inexperienced teachers planned lessons around linguistic issues in the text while experienced teachers went beyond the text in their planning. The results of this study show the opposite to be true, especially for prelistening activities, suggesting that there are other factors at work.

What might those factors be? Is it simply that the teachers we looked at here diverge in their political awareness, with the inexperienced being more "political" than the experienced? Is it that experienced teachers were trained as teachers in the days when outside issues were seldom taken up in the classroom? Clearly there are other avenues to explore. Perhaps a wider and larger sample would yield different results.

One key to understanding might be Westerman's (1991) finding that experienced teachers plan lessons based on what they think students know. Richards et al. call this "learning to think . . . from the learner's perspective" (p. 19). It could be that the ISs are not ignoring what students know but are focusing instead on their knowledge of the world rather than on their linguistic knowledge. As inexperienced teachers, they are less sure how their lessons fit into the students' linguistic knowledge, yet are fairly certain what the students know in terms of world knowledge. If this is true, teacher education programs would do well to give teachers-in-training greater awareness of the language their students are likely to know.

perhaps through readings in comparative education or through looking at EFL syllabi.

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